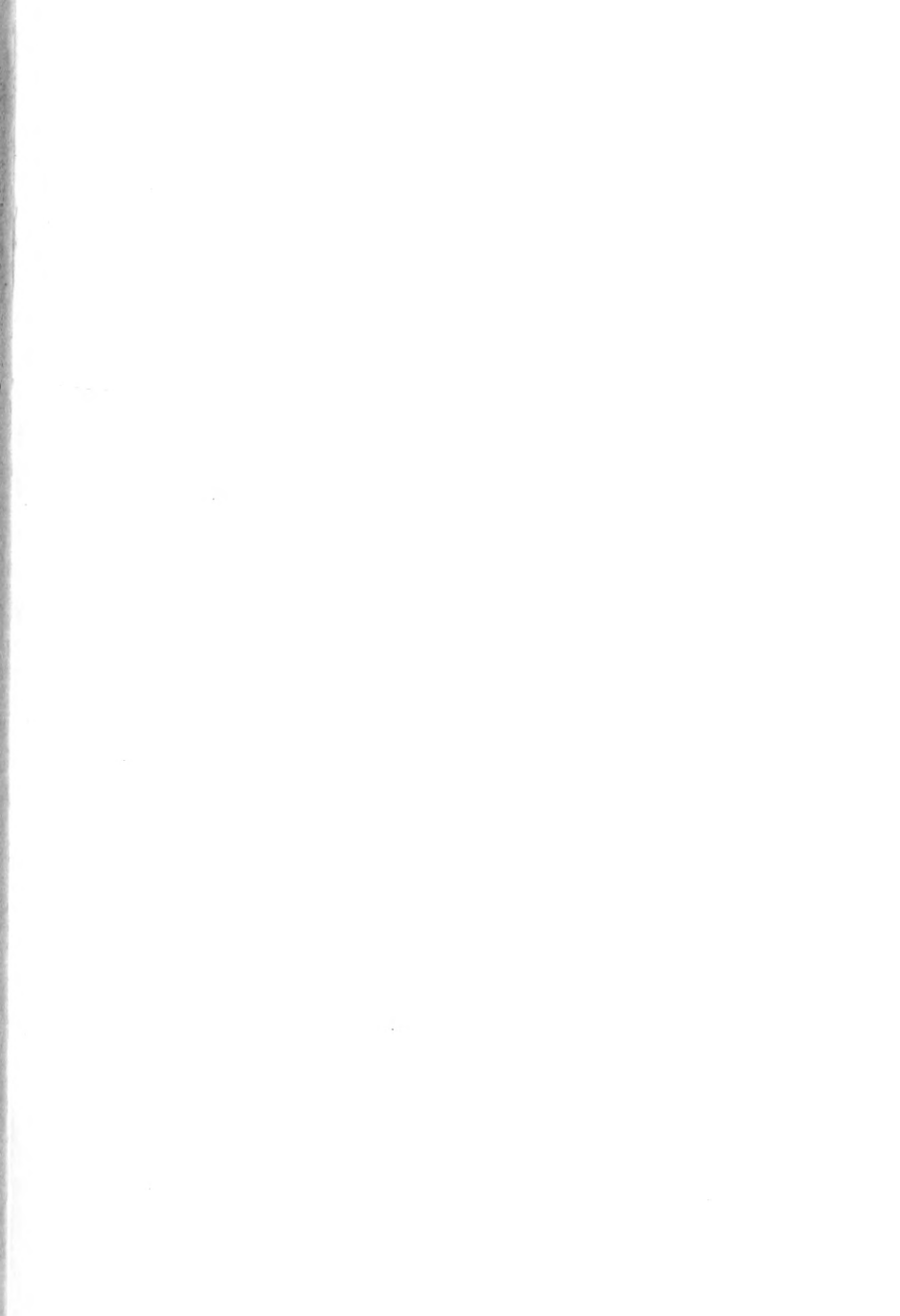




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MAIDEN ECSTASY

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MAIDEN ECSTASY

BY

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'PARABLES AND TALES' 'NEW SYMBOLS' 'LEGENDS OF THE MORROW'
ETC.



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THE BETROTHED





THE BETROTHED.

I.

HER boat is scudding on and on

Like a white shell hand-pitched from out the creek ;
She holds the rope, her canvas flaps, anon

Is puffed like cherub's cheek.

Half smiles she while she watches, half she fears,

So fast she flits, so joyous feels to leap
Two waves as one whose jagged jaws she clears
That fall back empty as they prowl the deep.

II.

A sculptured and stone-coffined race

By ancient death in armour clad for aye
In her survives ; that healthful, daring face
Mirthless yet seeming gay.

Holding her lips to sip the salty gust,
 Splashed by the spray-lit billows, wave by wave
The wind is parrying off the water's thrust
 While all she sighs for is that glairy grave.

III.

A seigneur, watching from his bay,
 Sees two dark lines, with danger in their trail,
Bar the west sky, that, while she seems at play,
 A gust may sink her sail.
More than his honour, than his life far more,
 He loves the venturous maid and spares not haste
To push his boat out with his ashen oar,
 As though the fateful moment were her last.

IV.

She sees him, laughs, and drops her sail :
 He presses on, rippling the sunny seas,
Grateful to tell her love's alluring tale
 While sinks away the breeze.
In lulled enchantment, boat by boat they sit
 Mating their hearts though it be not to wed :
Hers gives she, but her sire has plighted it,
 Whence had that laugh an echo with the dead.

v.

Saith she, 'Though martyrdom be ours
This can we bear : to us is daring given
Wherewith to meet the cloud that o'er us lowers ;
It is as health from heaven.'
He answers, ' Hope yet have I when alone
To breathe in me a 'courage from above :
When you are nigh that whisperer is gone,
Because it has no place within your love.'

vi.

She says ' Let us await the end !
Tears that to dryness flow,—such were our tears
To drop upon the burning sands, to blend
With the parched, desert years !
Honour remains, through it can we behold
A world that still is beautiful and large ;
Our fathers won it in the days of old,
Unstained, the heirloom passes to our charge.'

vii.

' When is the sacrifice to be,—
Your love in mine, but in that wedding shroud ?
She answers not, but seems to ask the sea
And darkly pluming cloud.

These waver, while her passing wish has waned :
Her heart's life rising is again extinct,
As if her fatal promise were unchained
Only to be in stronger bonds relinked.

VIII.

Sadly he says, ' My heart is rash
That would your spotless honour even pain,
For not as hands can we our conscience wash
And rid it of a stain.
Oh ! that some sudden turn of time would show
A way, yet open, to our hidden home,
Or point to the dark end, to never know
In its long night the suffering years to come ! '

IX.

She murmurs, ' Oh ! that newly born
We now could see the way we might have seen,
Free from our own remorse and others' scorn :
And this might once have been.'
She lifts her sail, she cuts a wave in twain ;
But the black lines have met, the gust comes down,
Her boat is drawn below the ready main
And lets her like a water lily drown.

X.

He plunges to the burial plains
 'Neath the reft surge, then thinking not of death ;
Not till the lovely lost one he regains
 Who smiles without her breath.
He can but bear his darling to the shore,
 O miracle of death wrought of a storm !
To tend her ever, though she live no more,
 And in his castle lay that precious form.

XI.

Yet she is his, her lips declared
 Her heart's life to him in their latest bloom ;
Yes, she is his, ah ! thus ! and yet if spared
 More sad had been her doom !
His to the last, and now can human force
 Not sever them ! ' Sweet lips, revive ! ' he cries,
As at his breast he breathes upon the corse
 That, knowing not its life, there conquered lies.

XII.

Long has he sobbed to those meek charms,
 Not hoping now, when comes a loving stare :
She wakes enclosed within his tender arms
 Yet feels no stranger there

But smiles, not turning from his gentle hold.

‘ Kiss me, beloved ! ’ she utters, and his cheek
She fondles as her arms his neck enfold,
Till in her quiet love again she speaks.

XIII.

‘ Have I slept long, for I have dreamed
My heart’s life o’er again : its early ways
In one swift-flowing memory o’er me streamed
Into my youthful days,
In love with all until this love I knew.
When came a rush of joy, for then we met
And to your heart my heart in secret flew,
And still is yours, beloved ! and with you yet.

XIV.

‘ Then, I remember, still I went
Through my heart’s life until a wind arose,
And o’er my sinking boat towards me you bent,
And being seemed to close,
But in your arms ! Oh ! in so sweet a rest,
I felt death’s calm like life come over me
And hush me into slumber on your breast
Beneath those dreamy waters of the sea ’

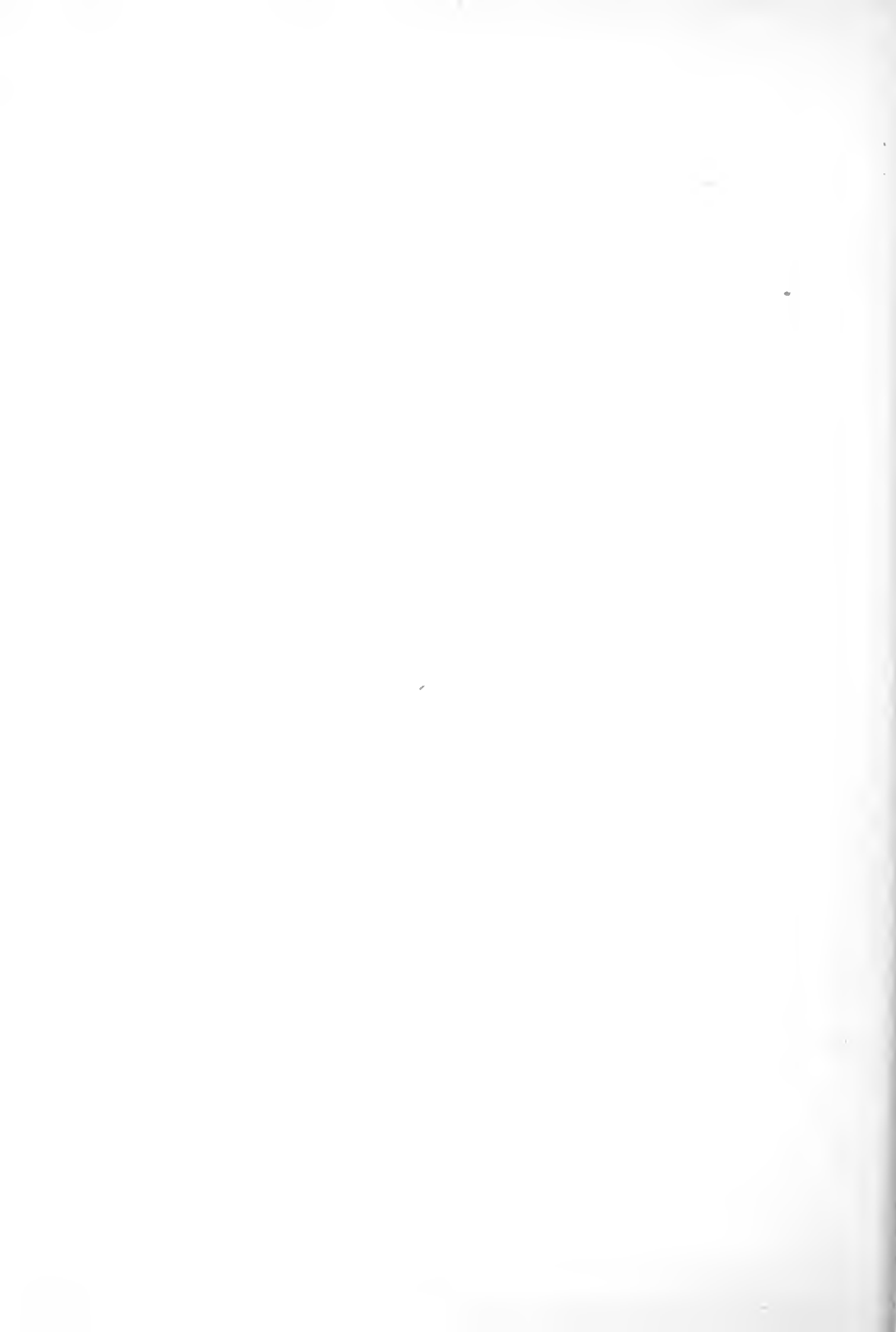
xv.

He saw she knew not how she came
To be his own, and as the days passed by
None would recall the plighted lover's name
To her new memory.
From her heart's life the drowning flood erased
All but the one true love which clung within ;
So was her pledge, with all its ills, effaced,
And her life changed to what it might have been.





THE ACTRESS





THE ACTRESS.

I.

THERE lurks a subtle bane
In those dark eyes as 'twere an angel's sting,
While all would gaze again,
Would die to feel the ravishment they bring.
The film that they diffuse,
Glazing her soul's emotion, ofttime swells
To tears that seem to muse
As with the glistening drops she works her spells.

II.

'TIS told of her, that nursed
In early childhood nigh a poisonous stream,
She drew the drops accursed
That still within those cypress-lashes gleam,

Whence has her colour fled
And left a marble of her magic brow :
Yet her twain lips hang red
As doth the double cherry on the bough.

III.

'Twas in a leafless land
That locusts stripped ; where the furred monster
trode ;
Where fallow is the sand
And speckled like the belly of a toad.
But genius is her own ;
Art, grace, the rapture, unto her belong
Who can her voice intone
To all the passions of a world in song.

IV.

Her notes persuasive drop
From her ripe lips as from a mellow flute ;
They linger, then they stop
And leave the ebb-flood of emotion mute.
First love she disenchant,
That lists to her unwarily and meets
In her its loftier wants,
As on the softened heart her witchery beats.

v.

Comes she to move the dead
And paradise re-model on the earth,
Or here her light to shed
As if another planet gave her birth ?
Even as her love transcends
All that can minister to man's desires,
Its wonder only ends
In thoughts of better worlds where rapture tires.

vi.

It is no play that holds
Men's fate suspended in her fervid part :
The actor whom she folds
Within her arms is carried to her heart.
Even lovers who would pour
From their awed tongues dumb words they dare not
speak,
Watch her, and mute no more
Turn their eyes from her and each other's seek.

vii.

Her witchery is love :
She of her plenty moulds it to all moods
That passion knoweth of ;
The love that finds its own, the love that broods.

But deep behind her smile
 She counts the torments her fond art supplies,
And never, in her guile,
 Withholds the gaze wherein infection lies.

VIII.

Yet, precious seem the gifts
 Of lips that tremble in their radiant place,
When her large eyes she lifts
 And the love-shadow passes o'er her face.
Then diamond wreaths requite
 Her flashing glance ; pearls, ruby set, repay
That smile of borrowed light
 Lit by a soul whose love is far away.

IX.

But oh ! that heart which loves
 And is despised, while through in-reaching gloom
The vengeful spirit moves
 Champing in bridled hate the bit of doom.
Even then her mirror told
 More had her charms dropped from her in a day
Than in the years of old ;
 That time was there her face to disarray.

X.

Her beauty feels its wane,
And lovers dare repel her false caress,
And change to them is gain .
Now newer faces seize the hour's success.
Her eyes' empoisoning sting
At length harms not ; the serpent-art is dead,
While faint applauses ring
O'er her whose lightnings once the tempest led.

XI.

Long was her star's decline ;
Lustrous as in its rise, she tarries still ;
And who her art divine
Shall reach, and who the coming void re-fill ?
But gentler youth is balm
To the strained stage, and to the hurtful scenes
Brings nature's welcome calm,
As Spring the fretful Winter kindly weans.

XII.

As on the desert cast
Where her high life began ; of arts disarmed ;
One with the wintry blast,
She rails against the mighty she has charmed.

Yet shall not end her fame !

Not while she lives shall one her art displace,
But ages with her name
Shall ring till time all memory efface.

XIII.

O'er the dim city street,
Where cloaked-up splendour hastes from many a
door,
Falls down the galling sleet,
While crowds into the drama-palace pour.
Thither, oasis-decked
In flowers and drawn through desert-gusts, she brings
Her angry heart, self-wrecked ;
And ere the tocsin-stroke her triumph rings.

XIV.

Cold as a fate that stakes
Her being on her will, in her farewell
That dreaded part she takes,—
The matron who by her own dagger fell.
As in her greatest day
Are many terror-stricken and depart ;
They feel it is no play ;
That her fierce hand must turn against her heart.

XV.

Why does the knife remain

Where it was plunged, but that the woman dies ?

That jarring shriek of pain ;

That fall ; that body which dishevelled lies !

'Twas not the Actress braved

That hour, but natural tears of anguish wept :

Her soul's repose she craved,

And her last triumph won, she truly slept.





THE SPIRIT'S KISS



THE SPIRIT'S KISS.

I.

THROUGH its pale chrysalis her parting soul
Sees round it glow, in wide and dazzling maze,
Flowers of all hues wreathing a sombre pool,
The while with dying gaze
Her eyes untwist the beams, as from a spool
Of gorgeous sun-spun rays.

II.

She gathers in those colours, green and red
And azure, winding them with films of gold
Around her spotless spirit, thread by thread,
That, when her wings unfold,
In earth's flower-woven vesture garmented
She may her Heaven behold.

III.

But, a fond guest, she promises to stay
 Within her lover's soul and there to lie
Awhile in death ; not thence to pass away
 Till he shall also die.
'One are we, loved one,' oft-times would she say,
 'So will I linger nigh.'

IV.

He, near her, sees the pool frown deep and dark,
 As, overgrown with grass, against its rim
Floats helmless, oarless, her deserted bark
 Oft piloted by him,
Ere for her passage hence those waters stark
 Were shadow-scored and dim.

V.

Yet is she gay ; the gloom cannot beguile
 Her eyes from where her golden thread begins :
Intent upon the wreath, she has a smile
 As angel-like she spins
The disentangled beams, and talks the while
 Of the pure heaven she wins.

VI.

‘She dies as perfect souls have died before,’
 Sadly thinks he ; ‘her raptures thrown away ;
Yet does her morrow seem to her as sure
 As ’twere her wedding day,
Which, though she sleep with those who wake no
 more,
Even death cannot delay.

VII.

‘Many have died,’ he says, ‘and thus have given
 A promise the beloved again to see ;
But the warm vow has been as surely riven ;
 You will not come to me !’
‘Beloved,’ she says, ‘I’ll come, be it from heaven,
 Whate’er the barrier be !’

VIII.

She seems to vanish now into the glow
 That love diffuses o’er her fleeting face,
While the blue skies to him appear to flow
 O’er her in folds of grace,
Then break and leave her phantom form below ;
 The earth once more her place.

IX.

As one whose soul departs and reappears,
He watches her ; he has a look of dread ;
He shudders 'mid his doubts, as one who fears
The coming of the dead,
And the deep pledge that from her mouth he hears
Can never be unsaid !

X.

Still his eyes say, ' Beloved ! no safer cell
Than your dear body your dear spirit needs
To bar it from another last farewell ;
Oblivion all succeeds ;
Between the tomb and where the living dwell
No secret passage leads.'

XI.

But her eyes say, ' To me, the lucid skies
Are as a glass ; 'yond them a brighter day,
Which is our night, spreads out the galaxies,
In all their bright array ;
So clear the path that when the body dies
' The spirit knows its way.'

XII.

Then his eyes say, 'Think of the glozing wave
Whose flood, at last, the firmament o'erpowers ;
That buries hopes themselves that cannot save ;
And love and grief devours,
Deepening the depths of the forgotten grave
O'er which it laps and lowers.'

XIII.

But her eyes say, 'All lovely things emerge,
Though for a passing season they have died,
And rise anew, even ere the mortal dirge
Sends round its echoes wide.
The soul in its last ripple has a surge
Felt o'er heaven's inner side.'

XIV.

His hand held out, her hand has dropped in his.
'Angel of Light !' he cries, 'come yet once more.
Our hands are joined ; be it the pledge of bliss ;
And as to heaven you soar,
Into my lips, in one immortal kiss,
Your sacred spirit pour !'

XV.

The one last rapture of her look unites
Their souls ; hers now the death-lamp, his the tomb
Where she would stay with her unravelled lights,
That can no more illumine
The deep eye-hollow of the starless nights ;
The brooding place of doom !

XVI.

A naked tree of life her grave embowers ;
There droops her wreath on which the sickly sun
But pastures now the slowly working hours :
His course for her has run ;
He heeds not now her everlasting flowers,
And they his glitter shun.

XVII.

‘ There lies she in a soul-devouring urn,
Or she would mind her pledge and come again :
But nevermore,’ he cries, ‘ can she return
To still these achings vain :
Were hope a sun ’twould one day cease to burn
And ever dead remain.’

XVIII.

'The kiss came not, but shapes that plunge in sleep
Startle his senses and his night-watch share :
In terror's track across his room they sweep
And pale the blacker air,
While tearless burn into the rayless deep
His eyes, in red despair.

XIX.

A flickering soul, as in a charnel-house,
Shines dimly within his ; to him it clings,
As though the dead the living would espouse,
Whence terror comes that wrings
A heart no lingering courage can arouse ;
That beats as if on wings !

XX.

This dread is gone ; in wondrous calm he lies
And feels her radiance not all from him torn,
Her image oft-times breaking on his eyes
Like slowly coming morn.
His heart has heaved its few remaining sighs ;
His hand falls fever-worn.

XXI.

Falling, there drops an unseen hand in his,
While creeping terror o'er his being steals :
His calm is death-webbed and a frozen bliss
His stiffened spirit seals,
When clings unto his lips an unseen kiss
And his last breath congeals.



THE DANCING GIRL





THE DANCING GIRL.

I.

ON tiptoe poised amid a world of Song
As though sweet sound allured her to the chase,
She steps into the dance, and threads a throng
Of limbs that dazzle space,
Till music drops and the tired notes among
She triumphs in the race.

II.

As one whose heart o'erruns the pregnant chords
Of the soul's tongue, so glides the dancing girl
When passion's flood in music's steps she fords
With nimble, circling swirl
Of limbs more fluent than the flow of words,
As dizzily they whirl.

III.

Sweet thought must through the spirit's darkness creep
Ere it see day ; she all her being flings
Into the dance : the music's wondrous sweep
Unto her footfall clings,
And, as a nymph from out the billow leaps,
From her soul's fount she springs.

IV.

Draped in her gossamer, where'er she goes
A pliant fold her inmost grace repeats,
While at her heart burns red the panting rose
That on her bosom beats :
But not the eyelash flame that hidden glows
One watchful lover meets.

V.

None dare interpret all her limbs express,
That clad in music thus divinely move ;
Those arms would all embrace, those lips caress
The heaven-descending dove :
More than the thought dare dream of they confess,
Because their art is love.

VI.

At length she lifts her bashful eyes and sends
Their glory o'er the crowd that shouts her praise,
When in the midst is one who towards her bends
His soul's deep pitying gaze ;
And that sad look her hour of triumph ends,
And thenceforth on her stays.

VII.

That look 'mid crowded eyes, that only one,
She sees ; all else around the arena reels ;
And in that look entranced her power is gone ;
Naught present else she feels ;
Though to her heart she go to be alone,
That look to her appeals.

VIII.

Her eyes, thus breaking once their bashful vow,
Are lost ; that gaze has closed their little range :
A frown, like grief's, is narrowing her brow ;
But most her smile is strange ;
As stricken by that pitying look, so now
Its panic does not change.

IX.

That eye which spoke a sorrow still is near ;
Enough that once its gaze upon her came :
'Neath it the music staggers in her ear,
Yet fell it not in blame,
Though sank her feeble feet from her in fear,
Too weak to prop her shame.

X.

The stage is gone ; her homely griefs begin
Now nobler aims too late her heart controul :
Her face appears to steep itself in sin
Though innocent her soul,
Save that ere pride awoke she strove to win
The fascinating goal.

XI.

But she has won the world ; they cry aloud
To look upon her as they cross her door ;
She is their idol ; the deserted crowd
Must see her face once more :
Their goddess now, they call her from her cloud
That they may still adore.

XII.

To her a minstrel sings with passion's voice,
 'Why hid'st thou from our sight, beloved bride?
Be at our feast, the world's desire rejoice,
 All arms are opened wide ;
The prince invites ; oh ! hearken to his choice,
 He calls thee to his side !'

XIII.

The pitying look is gone, and meets her sight
 The large-eyed rapture of the minstrel's gaze :
Their eyes consent, and in a strange delight
 She listens while he plays ;
And love that singeth with a minstrel's might
 Her fluttering heart obeys.

XIV.

The crowd has borne her to the palace stairs :
 She trembles and again her heart is sad ;
But for the hour she casts away her cares,
 For she sees others glad :
Ah ! 'tis the minstrel who awaits her there,
 In gold and purple clad !

XV.

The gentle crowds attend her as their own ;
Soft music sounds, and sylphs to her advance ;
The minstrel leads her to a velvet throne
And looks upon the dance.
Lost in her wonder there she sits alone
And gazes through her trance.

XVI.

Then saith the minstrel, 'Tis the prince commands :
Be it my part to play, to dance be thine.'
The silver chords are ringing in his hands ;
She sees them flash and twine,
And can but listen, as she helpless stands,
To music's throb divine.

XVII.

Still would she dance, but ravished at the sound
Seems held in some high snare above her thought ;
The hall spreads out like heaven, its blessed bound
Into sky-music caught.
Her senses dance, but ever from the ground,
Such wonder love has wrought.

XVIII.

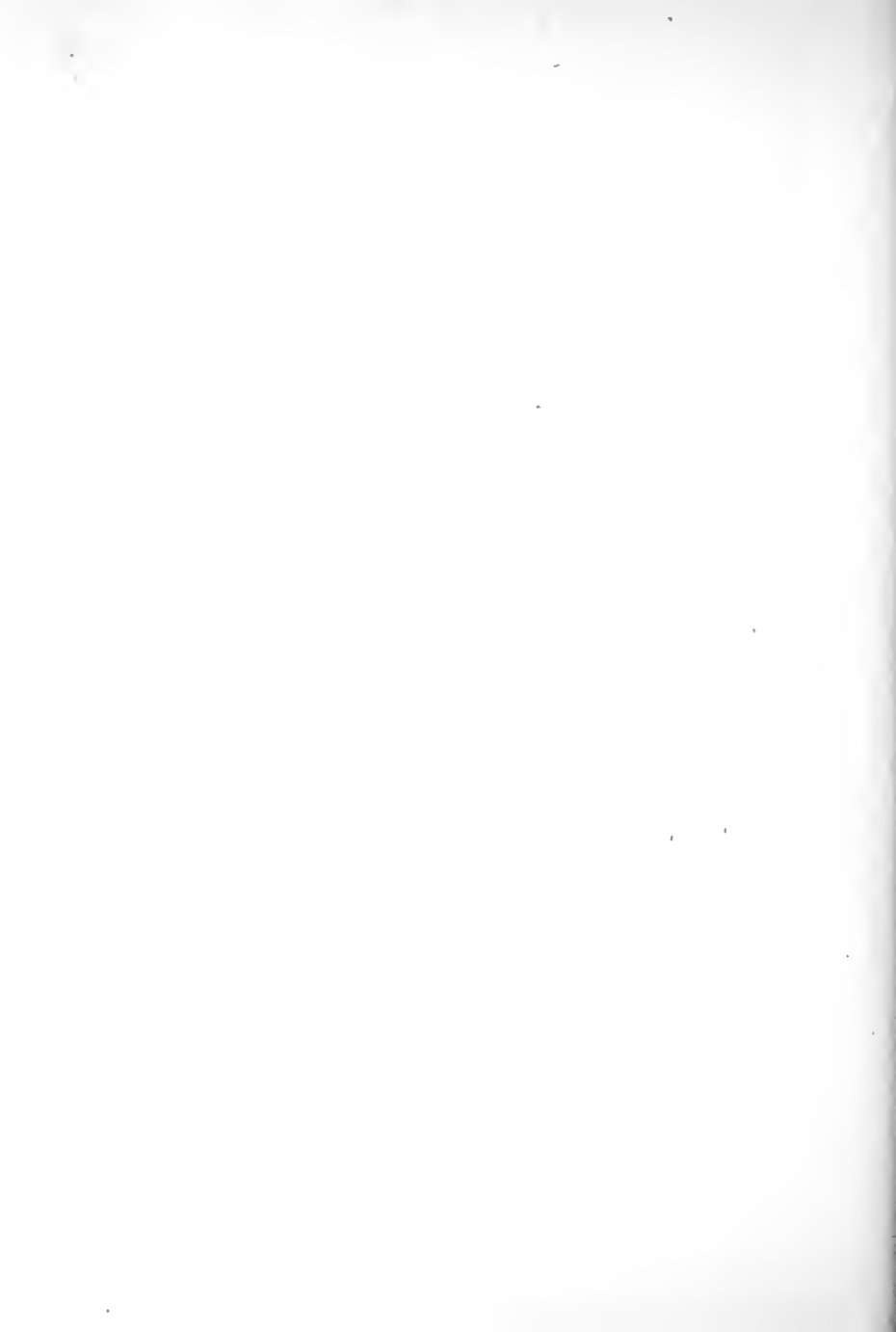
Then knows he that his kingly spirit fills
Her perfect heart, and that his sorrowed eyes
Have lifted her to where her bosom thrills
And finds its paradise :
Himself the prince who loves her, and who wills
To win the beauteous prize.

XIX.

His music ends ; the spell has dropped ; when, lo !
The hall of kings a sanctuary appears :
The sylphs, in double ranks, like vestals flow,
And each her cresset bears.
The broad-based altar-fire, with spiral glow,
A flame of love uprears.

XX.

The organ speaks, when swells a solemn peal ;
And fondly sings the choir, ‘ Come forth, most Fair !
The minstrel pleads, he seeks of thee his weal,
He prays thy heart to share.’
More bright the altar burns, the lovers kneel
Upon the sacred stair.



THE VISIONARY



THE VISIONARY.

I.

HER eyes, that leap like fountains into day
At sounds of joy, are to the sunlight blind,
Yet through night splendours track their starry way
And every planet find :
Her soul inlaid with each familiar ray
In colours of the mind.

II.

To her lone eyes the sun had never been,
But hid in mists of glory, over bright,
Stretched out a kindly veil that served to screen
All evil from her sight.
Pure as the heavens was earth, to her, unseen
Save in the moon's soft light.

III.

The rolling blaze of noon, the pearl-shot skies
That in light's urgent gusts to redness glow,
Enact not summer-day before her eyes:
The sun she cannot know ;
So, a lost star she seems afar that lies
From all this glare below.

IV.

Like the pale petals of a hanging rose
Her eyelids droop, though daylight be outside ;
But to the filtered moonbeams they unclose
As night-flowers open wide,
And drink of the new lustre while it flows
And clothes her as a bride.

V.

The Angelic Brother, Heaven's First Painter born,
Had coloured on her heart his Paradise,
That in day-blindness lives she not forlorn,
But knows the crowded skies ;
The future day beholds, the youthful morn,
Where vision never dies.

VI.

When the moon-mirror at her window stays
 Flashing its signal from the drowsy sky,
She hails her day, allied to other days
 Of jewelled memory,
And, the night through across the shadow strays
 While worlds are passing by.

VII.

Her sightful soul bursts forth, her vision burns,
 That, as her eyes on the calmed forest fall,
The trunks are whitened ; the green leafage turns
 To silvered verdure, all ;
And iced in light are sombre ferns,
 And the black cypress, tall.

VIII.

She now is by the marsh whose mirror takes
 Heaven's sisters down to its twin, watery skies,
And greater than the starless noontide makes
 The world she there descries,
While all above her and beneath her breaks
 On her exalted eyes.

IX.

She crieth : ‘ What art thou, Sun, when this great scene
Is but thy shadow ! Oft I look on high
At yonder moon, and see no night between
My vision and the sky ;
How dark, then, to my soul has ever been
Thy one proud mystery !

X.

‘ While he still lived, who was to me a sun,
Here stood we where the marsh two heavens had blent
Sun over sun ; the day then o’er him shone,
My soul’s last day, now spent :
Yet is the passion of that day my own
Though sun from sun be rent.

XI.

‘ Had I not loved content my heart had been
To bless its lot, and not in spirit weep
To see the paradise that he had seen ;
To share his lofty sleep,
And dream it was a sun that shone between
Our souls from yonder steep.

XII.

‘ But still between us the night-glory flows ;
We see it, share its joys : the fuller day
Brought by slow-coming death his spirit knows ;
I linger on the way ;
Yet would I see how the great sun arose
And bless his mighty ray ! ’

XIII.

Across the trembling air-gulphs from her soul
A light arose, as the moon-mirror hung
Before her, lucent as the marshy shoal
That heaven on heaven had flung :
She sees the sun in the moon-mirror roll
Its distant skies among.

XIV.

It was the sun in glory visible
Through the moon-mirror, deepened like the flood
That held the night-orb, shining at its full,
And heavenly neighbourhood ;
In the moon-mirror, clear as glassy pool,
The sun before her stood.

XV.

‘O vision yet more wondrous than my dreams,’

Her heart exclaims, ‘that dost vouchsafe the light
Which from all days hath been, that o’er me streams
And thus exalts my sight !
To his dear eyes, that see me in those beams,
I am no more in night !’

XVI.

Her soul seemed lost as in a soul’s embrace
Before the day-revealer, while he shone
In the new heaven and lit her raptured face,
Pale like the Parian stone
That of a life still bears the lovely trace,
Although the soul hath flown.

XVII.

Her vision floats along the sunny deep
In the new heaven that spreads before her eyes,
While ever wider is the mirror’s sweep
Across those foreign skies ;
When lo ! flash out, along the topmost steep,
The hills of Paradise !

XVIII.

While yet her spirit climbed the dizzy height
Step after step into eternal day,
Her eyes seemed watchful of the guiding light
Till glistened one last ray,
When, resting in the solemn vault of night,
Dead by the marsh she lay.





THE FIRST LOVE





THE FIRST LOVE.

I.

A NYMPH of laughter and her playmate boy
Knew in their youth a love already old,
Though in the safety of its perfect joy
It lingered still untold.
Her heart was his heart's friend, so closely knit,
A spark let fall on one, the fire had spread
And a new passion lit
To burn into the lips in friendship's stead.

II.

With crown and gryphons blazoned, high enrolled
Amid strange lists of station, was her name ;
Not so his own ; and he his love controlled
Till he had seized on fame.

As sisters on a brother's love rely,
So lets she not her fancy rove in quest
Of rich-toned flattery,
But in her home finds hourly-smiling rest.

III.

Yet is her dream one day to wedded be
Unto his like, which many knew who sought
This lively maid, for in her heart was he
Her one all-guiding thought.
So, self-betrayed, had others learnt her choice ;
Had feigned by turns his glad and sombre mood ;
And with his ringing voice
Or sober looks, as chanced, her steps pursued.

IV.

But her heart too had caught his changeful way,
So 'gainst her seeming fickleness who strove
Lost by to-morrow all they won to-day :
There was no place for love.
Whether, all truth, no subtle arts they feign
Or mould their grace to please her in his stead,
All follow her in vain :
Heartless she seems, unwilling to be wed.

V.

Her playmate, oft at sea, brings back to shore
The missing charm, when twofold merriment
Springs up, as if one half their joy he bore
Whether he came or went.
And, though he leave, 'tis as a brother leaves,
For where joy is can no mischance appear :
'Tis but the heart which grieves
That fails to see a distant time as near.

VI.

Long was he absent, and her parents said
' 'Tis time to fix your heart and give your bond :
In her full beauty should a maiden wed
And think of life beyond.'
They urge her ; she surveys the world in vain :
Ere she can love must she his likeness know
But only meets again
Memories of joy no other can bestow.

VII.

At length one of the many brings the gifts
Seen but in one before ; so bright, so rare :
Towards him her heart, though anchored, slowly drifts ;
She meets the absent there.

Sea-battles, storms, escapes, adventures few
Has he to tell her ; home-won victories
His path of peace bestrew,
And draw for him at last the promised prize.

VIII.

As with the peach, two kernels in their stone
Lie closely hidden 'neath one luscious rind,
So with this maid ; two hearts that seem but one
Are in her breast enshrined.
The weaker with a full affection teems,
As doth a mother's who the feeble child
Still living priceless deems,
Until a stronger on her love has smiled.

IX.

But like a fairy garden 'neath filmed ice
That shuts in half a flower, her love-dreams melt,
And vanishes the little paradise
That did her prospect belt.
Upon the peaceful sea at anchor rides
A war-ship, and her first love steps on shore,
When woe her heart betides
Which sinks, as drowning, at the cannon's roar.

X.

His life-affection, loosed from its controul,
He tells her, and she listens in dismay :
Ere all the raptured words escape his soul
Her senses sink away.
From her white face the shifting bloom has fled
And sends up her heart's shadow to those cheeks,
Deserting her for dead,
When o'er her brow, in drops, the anguish breaks.

XI.

'Twas nigh the beach, his flagship full in view,
He told her how for love of her he fought
When the grand vessel into battle flew
And won the prize he sought.
Now as a sea-king's was his will obeyed :
But glory, what avails it, what is fame
Unless his loving maid
Share with him all his honours and his name?

XII.

She clasps her bosom, flies from place to place
Heedless of where her tears fast falling drop ;
As though a sobbing sky came o'er her face
They never seem to stop.

Then in her dire distress, besought to speak,
She only whispers, 'No, it cannot be ;'
But looks around to seek
Some voice that yet may turn her destiny.

XIII.

'O God !' he cries, 'Through all these hopeful years
Your love has been my lode-star ; not in vain ?'
The gust of words has driven back her tears ;
Her kisses fall like rain.
Her lips are maddened, both her arms embrace
His neck with a rude rapture, while her cheeks
Fondle his welcome face,
And turn his lips to kisses when he speaks.



THE HEART-BROKEN





THE HEART-BROKEN.

I.

WHOM hath the missile slain ?

While one is pierced, another, far remote,
Presses her heart : the sudden pain

Her bosom too hath smote.

He on the battle-field in other lands,

She in the hope and sunshine of her day
Basking in love, death-stricken stands,
And both are swept away.

II.

Her cheeks, rose-red and white,

The colour leaves them never to return
From when she felt his death-blow smite
And in her bosom burn.

The spring is snapped, asunder are its ties :
She dares not stir, she feels her blood is shed ;
So dies she as her lover dies,
Although she fall not dead.

III.

She stayeth still below :
Must she within death's narrowing grasp survive
As long as blood is left to flow ?
She seemeth still alive ;
The slow dull pang awarded as her lot !
He sleeps, she hath her bosom only cleft ;
He is in death and suffers not ;
To her the world is left.

IV.

Twin hearts, o'er one alone
Death had no power, so bore a twofold curse
That, on his heart the ravage done,
The weapon sought for hers.
One tomb, although for one the other wait :
Her heart, there, bleeding on the shadowy wall
She pants to pass the half-open gate
And on the dead to fall.

v.

The sunset's yellow stain
Is on her now, lest pale as death she grow ;
Her beauty left to slowly wane
In that memorial glow.
With lips that shiver through the sultry days,
Death came and spoke to her ere winter-time,
And stabbed her with his frozen rays
And slew her in her prime.

vi.

Cold is she in the gust
Whose vulture-swoop whirls o'er her lover's mound ;
That blows about the autumnal dust ;
That has a pausing sound ;
And she can trace it from its furthest bourne
To where it stops, and where the dust it lays ;
Yet does it journey but to mourn
While at her heart it stays.

vii.

The world's so busy stir
Is like a past ; the sound of wedding-bells
Has some lost meaning, and to her
Of former being tells,

Where love once found in memory a home,
Distant as now the soul from infant thought,
Whence shadows of old feeling come
And pass away as nought.

VIII.

Yet whence the flash of pain
That in its quiet doth her bosom wring?
'Neath where her hand is pressed again
Death turns about his sting.
She holds her breath, watches her agonies
Dragging her back into her first despair,
To learn it is the loved one dies,
And she the pang must bear.

IX.

Death, faithless to the dead,
Shines on her, with her living beauty toys ;
His ghastly halo, o'er her spread,
Her golden hair alloys.
Her cheeks seem in an open sepulchre ;
Her eyes are dulled, her lips, that wordless move,
The worm unseen appears to stir :
Yet what a face has love !

X.

A year is gone at last :

On the new morrow she awakes so gay
That surely she forgets the past ?

Even thinks not of the day !
What means it that her eyes in lustre range
An empty world, and, void of memory,
Into a bridal beauty change
Some blissful path to spy ?

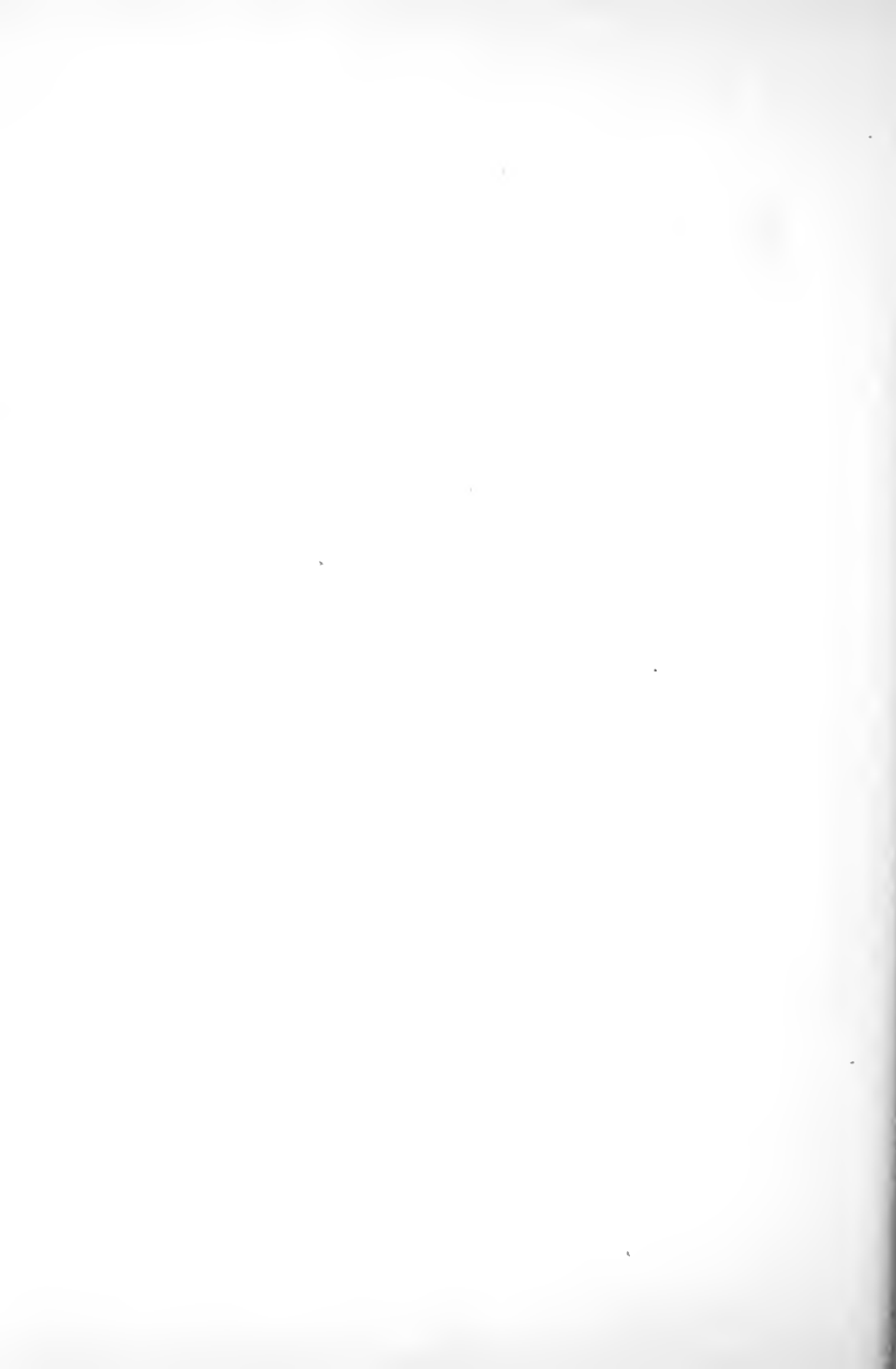
XI.

Perchance, the love of old
Brings back its hour, and her expanded soul
Doth in its former light unfold ?
Her broken heart seems whole !
But soon, as though a sudden thought had whirled,
She listens, 'tis the warning to depart :
With a light death-moan only heard,
Her hand falls from her heart.





THE CHILD OF ROMANCE





THE CHILD OF ROMANCE.

I.

As suns may rise and set unknown
In paths beyond the farthest ken,
So maiden thoughts, in journeyings lone,
May hide from sight of men :
Though where they wander waves may only flow,
They seem in sunny gardens to alight,
Gathering their flowers where buds can only blow
To bloom in visions bright.

II.

Oft may a maiden's eyes be lift
And shed their longings o'er the air,
And see a vision towards them drift
Of him she deems most fair,

Who falls into her reverie of bliss
As though in life to play a lover's part,
Not pausing even to question who it is
Whose loadstone lures his heart.

III.

So dreams the daughter of Romance
By seas that delve their shifting caves,
And sows the love-germs of her glance
Among the ploughed-up waves.
So is her future, ere it comes, besprent
O'er her rapt eyes and there doth it disclose
The being unto whom her heart's consent
Prophetically flows.

IV.

Where streams of water-lightning ran
All night along the ocean-foam
Romance had ruled, ere known to man,
That dreamy maiden's home,
Had lit up darkness 'twixt the flash of waves.
There, sitting with her elbow on her knee
While flame the beacon-rock beneath her laves,
She looks out on the sea.

V.

There doth the glow-worm gild its grange
Of wavy grass and o'er the blades,
Unconscious of its love-lamp, range
The pale, green misty shades.
There oft this child of young Romance would sit
Her head sunk back, her raven hair afloat
Self-wreathed in verdure, by the glow-worm lit,
Chartering her idle boat.

VI.

But the dream passes from her face
Now seas that feel the lightning-lash
Run at the troubled ship in chase
Along the beacon's flash.
Her kindled eyes, lit up in sudden fear,
Keep watch and with the pilotage of hope
Draw the rocks off ; the crazy vessel steer
Down the waves' curling slope.

VII.

The beacon turns, the sea is black,
And her strained eyes more darkly glare
Until her tower-flame flashes back
Its steady, wondering stare,

And shows her how the battering waves o'erwhelm
A ship at sea that like a mountain quakes,
Foundering, while with the wave its sundered helm
On the rock-shallow breaks.

VIII.

Though sailors, strong and brave, may quail,
Her fears are younger than their fears ;
Though doubt may other breasts assail,
She takes the helm and steers,
Steers through the hearts of men and through the
waves ;
A thought of danger would her visions mock,
And from the storm the little crew she saves
And guides them to her rock.

IX.

Far off from where her watch-boat lay,
The crested waves upbear her fame,
And where they lave a wreck-strewn bay
A billow sounds her name.
But she has dearer thoughts than other's praise,
And to her mood the rock upon the shore
Brings back her visions, and of other days
She dreams her dream once more.

X.

When thinks she of that troubled night
Leaves it a dream that comes to pass ?
She muses in the glow-worm light
That smoulders through the grass :
Is it her dream that draws the one she loves,
The form her soul has fashioned to her own ?
Uncalled he comes who through her vision roves
At eventide alone.

XI.

A youth looks on her yet delays
His steps, for he must watch awhile
A love-dream lit by warmer rays
Than light a passing smile.
A sailor-youth she saved and saw no more ;
She knows him not, though thinking how he blessed
The glorious maid who steered him to the shore,
Right through the billows' crest.

XII.

She sees him not as on the night
When his lost vessel went in twain,
But as of old, when o'er her sight
He came to flit again :

Yet does she feel his coming to her side
In more than dream, that never knew her start :
But now he stays, and with her doth abide
That image of her heart.



THE SELF-CONSCIOUS



THE SELF-CONSCIOUS.

I.

LOVE, like an odour-bearing dew, distils
From her heart's flower, and with its innocence
Sweetens her soul and all her senses fills
With the new, heavenly sense.
Soon is her face with the love-witchery iit,
But when another comes its sweets to glean
It strives with bashful veil to cover it
Lest her new thoughts be seen.

II.

She is all love and one her love would claim,
Which 'neath his look she trembles to confess,
As if her heart had sinned and in its shame
Was stricken passionless.

As though the hills were on her eyelids piled
She stood abashed, in all her thoughts reproved
To feel but yesterday she was a child
In sight of him she loved.

III.

Her thoughts are only tendril-like entwined
One with another, clinging as in play,
And dare not yet about a lover's wind,
But shrinking, drop away.
Even thus perturbed, such love-allurements crowd
Her helpless face, no man, the least of these
Could dwell on, were he to an angel vowed,
And turn away in peace.

IV.

Her childhood pious, all her yearnings pure,
None deemed in her the passion lay so deep,
Or that her heart could all that love endure
And still its secret keep.
Shame held her who ere long had freely told
All her heart-sickness, now so hard to bear ;
But to avow it then appeared so bold,
She did her love forswear.

V.

Alone, her love half-angrily returns ;
 Its passion fuller, steeped in tears of shame,
Till every thought as its own cresset burns
 And dies away as flame.
So, reaching to her soul, the infective fire
 Flashes within her heart, runs on uncurbed,
Till but o'er embers creeps the pale desire
 That first her soul disturbed.

VI.

Her lover, angered ; she with fainting breath,
 Once hastily again each other crossed,
When seemed to both there was a sudden death
 Whereby a world was lost :
That angered glance comes ever now behind
 The loving look and passes to its place,
And thenceforth is the master of her mind,
 The despot of her gaze.

VII.

False vision ! yet the false the true o'ertakes,
 And, while the chase of madness lasts, her fate
Still borders on its course ; her love she stakes,
 As seemeth, 'gainst his hate.

On her crushed hope the unhoping heavy weighs,
Too weak to utter its life-mocking moan :
Ah ! of itself what buried soul can raise
Its monument of stone !

VIII.

Blank now the sacred page save that his eyes
Are graven where she turns the lost one's book,
And there they say her hope within them lies
As with a prophet's look.
Heaven hears her love, hears it before her prayer,
Her blushes still upon the altar strewn ;
But ah ! the angered face again is there,
With it is she alone.

IX.

But she knows heaven, and there a soul unveils
That wants to see the face without desire
Which softens sorrow and o'er love prevails ;
But heaven appears to tire.
So at her heart must all her love remain
Stifled in grief ; and to her maddened breast,
Familiar as her home, comes back again
The heaven that has no rest.

X.

Where are the tears, the tears so long unshed ?

Would they but flow and soothe the strangling pain
Round the fair throat, that, often clenched in dread,
Would still its scream restrain !

Closed up the heaven-way to her muttered prayer,
The shriek ascends ; so is her reason choked,
And the sad ravings of her soul's despair
Are poured out uninvoked.

XI.

‘This hand, did I refuse so poor a thing,

When, were he now the flood that rushes by,
I would be gone and to his bosom cling,
Were it to sink and die !

These eyes that he has loved, though still they bear
His image, would I give him ; even this breath—
Were it my last, and this wan, wasted hair
Down pouring unto death !’

XII.

Amazed, her loved one learns that all her speech
Is but the burning vow she fain had given,
Which, as she drifts away from human reach,
She mutters close to heaven.

He enters at the chamber where she lies :
There, but the sob of waters holds her sense ;
There, but the flashing torrent in her eyes
Sparkleth and floweth hence.

XIII.

While burn her cheeks beneath his piercing smile,
He seems within her mind, tho' at her side ;
The angry spectre in a little while
Must to her chamber glide.
Why waits she, by one leap might she elude
The form that shall ascend when this is gone,
The look of love too long by her has stood,
Why doth it come alone ?

XIV.

He leaves her, on her eyes the casement glows :
A balm-hung balcony of rustling leaves
Its broken, ever-flitting shadow throws,
Which the sun's tremor cleaves ;
The soothing sound of waters seems to say
That he is in their midst, that where they roll
Is bliss, and new-awaking unto day
And quiet to her soul.

xv.

An impulse grows within her, she must leap
 Into the flood ; the heavings of his breast
Allure her thither in their cold to steep
 Her heart that burns for rest.
Outside he stays to grieve, his only good
 To think she is within ; but, now, alarms
Are heard, she wildly rushes to the flood
 But rests upon his arms.



THE MAID OF SONG





THE MAID OF SONG.

1.

WHEN Autumn leaves are crisp and dry,
And hop like famished sparrows o'er the grass ;
When murky streams, turned noiselessly awry,
Round little icebergs pass ;
When hungry winds creep stealthily along
And paw the shivering rushes,—wooded dale
Hears not the Maid of Song ;
Mute in the silence of the nightingale.

II.

But when the passage birds of Spring
Burst like warm winds into the melting wood,
That thaws to hanging verdure while they sing
To earn love's livelihood,

'Tis then the joyous Maid of Song reveals
Her passion-notes, and covers the blank day
With sweetly trilling peals,
As flowers drop off the early blossomed May.

III.

She loves her voice, the trees shall lend
To it their leafy ears ; the shaking bough,
As 'neath the weight of singing-bird, shall bend :
It seeks of them no vow ;
No heart but hers its ceaseless ringing saps :
She has no nest whereof to guard the keep ;
When her tired notes relapse,
They break not on her mate's enchanted sleep.

IV.

She knew 'twas love so wildly sprang
From her heart's voice ; so must no other hear
Her secret : even the while she softly sang
She oftentimes stopped in fear.
As of the birds that build from chirp of morn,
'Mid sounds of bliss, their concert-woven nest,
Her love was virgin born—
The first full passion of her childish breast.

v.

As one who errs, and, unreprieved,
Prays with all passion, so her voice implores ;
It seems the lark's into blue mists received,
While heaven a song outpours.
With arms put forth, that fondly nurse her lyre,
With fingers dripping music on the strings,
With eyes of first desire
And face half turned above, she sweetly sings.

vi.

Then doth she skip, as when at play
A child may see a child it wished to meet,
And hastes along, still humming on the way,
Her echo-voice to greet,
Chanting as o'er a lake her beauty skims,
For there a fond-faced sister-siren floats,
And, while the flood it swims,
Echoes to her her gurgling water-notes.

vii.

She sings—'When come the merry times
You shall be wedded too, my sister sweet,
And to a lover's song give back the chimes
That vow for vow repeat.'

Tired of self-wooing, by the noontide lulled,
Her notes break off from endless song, and stop ;
Her shining eyes are dulled ;
Through too much love her resting eyelids drop.

VIII.

On evening's brink the noontide closed,
But o'er her sloped in sunbeams manifold,
As her soul's image on her face reposed ;
Yet she her secret told,
For, while she slept, she sang no more unheard ;
Her lover all her lonesome wanderings knew,
And watched her, as a bird
Would watch his mate, the love-long season through.

IX.

His lifted footsteps towards her creep
That the crisp sod may not betray his tread ;
Smiling he stops, and overlooks her sleep,
His hands above her spread.
He deems her his, caught in her lonely nest,
Yet stands he thus apart, in watchful trance,
Awed into rigid rest ;
Fain to go back, fain further to advance.

X.

Feebler her voice, her dreams among,
It runs in broken strains, but to the close,
From where the water echoed back her song,
Her secret overflows.
He gleans more love the while her coyness sleeps,
Than maid e'er uttered with her eyes awake,
And his heart wildly leaps,
Dreading a listener may her slumber break.

XI.

She starts from sleep, in self-surprise ;
The love-dream on her cheeks had left its flush ;
Fondly she hopes 'twas this disturbed her eyes,
Her hand put o'er her blush.
She struggles, with a faltering innocence,
To veil her love, despite the trembling fears
That song had ruled her sense ;
For the last notes wind through her conscious ears.

XII.

He holds his hands, as o'er a cage,
With the bird-snarer's smile and aspect droll :
He has her love ; she feigns a maiden's rage—
But he has caught her soul.

Yet would she fly, but 'tis on fluttering wings,
So weak she seems—her soul so surely his,
While her own words he sings,
With voice that doubts not of its present bliss.

XIII.

The secret words her lips had sung
He sings again ; he tells her how the boughs,
Whose leaves had with her love-confession rung,
Still echo back her vows ;
Tells her the water that her image held
Has caught her siren-melody by rote,
And, with its gurgle swelled,
Murmurs again the warblings of her throat.

XIV.

She all denies, though now she finds
Her secret known—in all its song arrayed ;
Told by the woods, the waters, and the winds,
Which have her love betrayed.
She all denies, but he the louder sings,
Until he lifts her voice to song again :
With love the welkin rings ;
Two hearts are wedded in one mingling strain.

THE SHEPHERDESS



THE SHEPHERDESS.

I.

By one whose heart kept watch was heard the fame
Of a bright world that, like a ship of war,
Was launched in heaven beside the last that came
O'er the sky's outer bar :
Her land Chaldea, she that blessed name
Gave to the coming star.

II.

Child of a lord, they called on her to reign
O'er that old story-land whose shepherds deem
The stars a flock that studs a holy plain ;
And she had learned in dream
That her loved land, through her, that star should gain
And with its blessings teem.

III.

But heartless deeds were of her father told
Who the fair daughters, in the mountains born,
Had captured and to days of slavery sold
Where bends the Golden Horn :
A shepherd chief, who robbed his neighbour's fold,
And took the lamb unshorn.

IV.

She bears her crook o'er living plains, her way
Through tents in which the thoughtful shepherds
dwell
Who watch the heavens where the bright grazers stray
And think they hear the bell
Whose holy tinklings, as they softly play,
The fates of men foretell.

V.

So doth she haste to meet her shepherd-seers
And see the promised star that shall eclipse
The one which filled her father's land with tears ;
And learn from their own lips
The happy portents that to man it bears
From the new heaven it skips.

VI.

While Tigris and Euphrates still o'erleap
 Their shallow bounds her camel slowly goes,
When nigh her tent, on vengeful errand, creep
 Her father's olden foes,
And seize her, helpless, in her noon-day sleep
 While all her tribes repose.

VII.

In a barred chamber, and in chains, a slave,
 She weeps with eyes upon the Golden Horn,
And thinks of far-off waters as they lave
 Blessed homes in Capricorn,
Where happy beings find the Heaven that gave
 To her the star new-born.

VIII.

Strangers have come and through her prison-grate
 They count her price and would her love allure ;
But her eyes restless watch and wide dilate ;
 Their look can none endure,
So wild in sorrow and so mild in hate ;
 In majesty so pure.

IX.

One comes towards whom the look of prayer she bends
That seems to utter 'Thou, my star, arise !'
And while that Heaven-adoring thought ascends
New sorrow fills her eyes,
That tells how Love is dead and beauty ends
When human pity dies !

X.

Ail that he has, the mystic life he bears,
What is their worth, her soul in slavery ?
He pays the ransom, breaks the chain she wears,
As though some god were he :
Voiceless, she offers up to him the tears
Her anguish has set free.

XI.

Hand-maids and armed protectors are at hand,
All that to queenly power and pomp pertains,
And, passing waters from the stranger-land,
Her star-roofed home she gains,
Where her sleek camels, crimson-girded, stand
To bear her o'er the plains.

XII.

In her slow path the faithful seers arrive
And with prophetic tidings bid her cheer :
That night, they tell, the older worlds shall strive,
As the new star comes near,
And into depths of unknown darkness dive
And find no other sphere.

XIII.

But little heed gives she to their appeals :
The coming star, alas ! not yet is found ;
Deep-sighing in her silence, she reveals
A heart in slavery bound :
Her bonds are there, and there it is she feels
The chain about her wound.

XIV.

'Mid joyous shouts she sees her open gates,
But enters not, up-gazing in the thought
That never sleeps or in her breast abates,
Where is the star she sought !
But now a greater seer her advent waits ;
He hath the tidings brought.

XV.

‘The hour is come, the star is now in sight ;
Portents of blessed change the heavens bestrew :
The shepherds upward gaze, the air is bright,
The sky is gold and blue,
The ancient stars are on their downward flight
And others come anew.

XVI.

‘And in the shower of burning worlds, self-hurled
From heaven to heaven, a lord is on his way
Around whose hosts the golden dust is whirled,
While, in divine array,
Green floats his shepherd-banner, wide-unfurled,
With flocks thereon at play.’

XVII.

The hour has come in clouds that hurry o’er
Her palace towers, and scatter while the rays
Of new-made light upon the valleys pour ;
While flocks awake and graze,
And shepherds sing and the new star adore :
But she, beholding, prays.

XVIII.

The seer of seers stands forth, he takes her hands ;
He cries, 'Thy star is come ! Be it to thee
A rich reward and to these teeming lands ;
The lord, who made thee free,
Now in his earthly place before thee stands,
Thy guiding-star to be.'

XIX.

She looks at heaven ; afar the cloud-vane drifts ;
Her face is pale, he comes, the lord is found :
She kneels, once more his slave ; the stranger lifts
The virgin from the ground,
And offers up for sacred wedding gifts
The chains her heart had bound.



THE LOST ANGEL



THE LOST ANGEL.

I.

AN angel child had slid
 Into the world, strange and alone :
Yet did all love, at its first fountain hid,
 Spring up in her unsown.
This child, by many reared, became
 A watcher of their flocks ; they took her in
But taught her not to breathe a mother's name,
 Or feel her orphan soul to theirs akin.

II.

Her love grew up to fill
 Scenes where the stumbling torrents leap,
O'er which, self-galaxied and free of will,
 The golden eagles sweep.

But less was she among her flocks
Than with the chamois on whose track she hung,
The vaulted avalanche that roofed the rocks
The dearest home of all she served among.

III.

It is her universe
And with a ksis she greets the sun,
Or listens as the laughter-floods rehearse
The thoughts that through her run.
But when a stranger passes by,
Like the wild creatures that refuse to stay
At her fond call, must she his presence fly,
Alarmed not, only timorous till away.

IV.

She springs to maidenhood
As a bright arrow skyward darts,
And, while she learns o'er earnest thoughts to brood,
Her early dream departs.
Things that have life without its cares,
The enticing flower, the waters' coaxing speech,
Give back for sighs the smiles of all her years,
And, not yet sad, a serious morrow teach.

v.

Her home is with the poor,
But why hath she that angel's face
Which seems a stranger at the cottage door?
Is there no better place
For this stray maid who knoweth not
Of that true paradise more beauteous still
Than had descended to her childish lot,
Slow with such souls as hers its seats to fill?

vi.

Those eyes more richly shone
Than heaven, more open in their love;
All lovely things rushed into them as one
Did she even speak or move.
Who gazed could never turn away,
For there was maiden beauty, as at first,
In its pure pomp and innocent display,
Despite a world at man's own choice accursed.

vii.

Those charms were scarce for one :
A face in all that wealth attired,
Unguarded, as a far-off desert lone,
As paradise desired !

So many seek her poor abode,
Rich in the graces which the unwary win :
The fiends who crave to be avenged on good
Through love, the only love that loves to sin.

VIII.

One comes whose lordly mien
Gives all around a rustic air ;
So changed are all things in his presence seen
That only he seems there.
His voice, but trembling, shakes her will ;
And who look on are rapturous at his power
Which can controul a heart that budding still
Yet droops as 'twere a heavy-laden flower.

IX.

Can love for love atone
With all the hidden woe it sends,
Can it to-day forecast the morrow's moan
In which its passion ends ?
But nature's priest has set his key
Within her heart, unlocked the golden door,
And heaven spreads out ; her soul in bliss is free ;
She looks not back, it is the earth no more.

x.

The key stays in her heart
And he who turns it finds consent :
He can those thrilling lips in love dispart
And close them in content.
Her gaze is drawn into his gaze ;
She sees the light of heaven but through his eyes ;
She smiles his smile as on his lip it plays ;
When he is sad she sighs again his sighs.

xi.

Where did those vallies lie
That hid awhile her childhood's dream
And left a night-cloud on the noon-day sky,
A shadow on the stream ?
All changes ; soul in soul they track
The scenes that tell her of those infant years :
The wondrous dream o'er the lost path comes back ;
The world she loved once more on earth appears.

xii.

Lost in his arms she feels
A happier childhood has begun,
Until another change to her reveals
The work of death is done.

O'er her, from birth, that lot had lowered :
Born low, what here availed an angel's charms
But by a lordly fiend to be devoured
And the sweet refuse cast out of his arms ?

XIII.

Her innocence remains,
The poison dreg subsides and leaves
A soul for ever pure, that nothing stains ;
It is an orphan grieves.
She tries her memory to repage,
To mark out there what thoughts to heaven she
takes,
What leaves behind her in her orphanage ;
Then, at one burst, her pent-up heart she breaks.



THE POETESS



THE POETESS.

I.

THE poetess, with drifting gaze that floats
Back on her inmost sight,
Seems one entranced who only tells the motes
That dance along the light ;
Yet holds she in her look the vales afar
Whose pastures doubly shine,
While burns her trembling mount whose summits are
To distant eyes divine.

II.

As a still bird that in its stillness hides
Seems not of living things
Till its neck glistens and at large it glides
On its defiant wings,

So, 'neath the summits of her two-peaked hill
Where seemeth nought to move,
In thought enthralled she tarries, waxing still
As solitary love.

III.

The poetess of maiden passion, she,
Though exiled be her joy,
Can with a note wake its full melody
And her stray bliss decoy.
As in the windings of a hollow shell
Rest memories of old,
In her the murmurs of past passion dwell
In rapture oft re-told.

IV.

Love's artless passion to a maiden breast
Can none like her recal,
So to her brow, for ages there to rest,
The leaves of laurel fall ;
And hearts in mourning to her mountain throng
To live again, to feel
Hers is the voice of an immortal song
No other can reveal.

V.

Her love, so early born, through childhood's days
In beauty only grew,
And, in its ardour, skipped in passion's ways
Ere it the passion knew ;
A torment to the hapless boy she chose,
Who shunned her but through shame,
While loving deeper than the blush that rose
When others spoke her name.

VI.

Breathless she sees towards her lone mount arise—
What phantom of despair !
Is it that he through those death-seeing eyes
Seeks his last solace there ?
Yonder he comes whence spires and gilded ships
Are imaged in the bay
Whose light, blue-dyed in heaven, so plenteous dips,
'Tis seen thus far away.

VII.

'Why come you hither,' asks the poet-maid ;
'To reap a wilderness
Where is no vine, where olive tends no shade
To shelter man's distress ?

It is my birth-place ; but a barren peak
Where maidens yearly bring
To me their secret grief and solace seek
And with their sisters sing.

VIII.

‘ Here, to escape awhile the city’s cry,
They come, heart-bruised and wan :
The white-winged, crimson-spotted butterfly
Dies at the touch of man.’
She turns aside and goes a little higher
O’er the last mountain spur,
Then sighs for him unseen, her heart on fire
While his eyes follow her.

IX.

She knows his face and hurries towards her peak ;
For, once he bade her die.
Seeks he the grave he told her there to seek,
Beside her now to lie ?
He knows not heaven had saved her and had sent
The message-birds of love
To soothe her grief, returning as they went,
On manna fed above.

X.

A little while and he has slowly clomb
The mountain path she crossed,
But nowhere doth he see a living home,
Or trace of her he lost.
'Nurse of young love, with sunbeam wings thou hiest
And everywhere may'st be !
Peace speeds thee, and this broken heart thou fliest
In its sweet company !'

XI.

Still for another maid he looks around,
While up the crag he creeps,
And o'er the cliffs still sees her spirit bound
Where but a river leaps.
This, thought he, is the scene of sacrifice ;
He shudders at his breath,
And, with her image living in his eyes,
Would follow to her death.

XII.

One look towards heaven, when, at a cavern's mouth,
On wings that earthward beat,
Two doves along the sky, from north and south.
With fluttering pinions meet.

The birds are pairing by the poet-maid
Who scarce perceives him there ;
Though o'er her face his sorrow casts a shade
That lightens his despair.

XIII.

Soft breathings issue from the cavern's mouth,
Not louder than a sigh,
But lift his spirit in its thought of death
To dauntless ecstasy.
She lists, she hears his broken-hearted wail :
His shouts the woe-depths rend :
Now like volcanic rage his accents fail,
Now burn as they ascend.

XIV.

' Here did I spurn the lost one, when a child
She prayed to only prove
Her love eternal, and with heart enviled
I told her death was love !
And then I pointed to the mountain side
Where the black water leaps,
And bade her deathward with the torrent glide
Where love eternal sleeps.

xv.

‘The thought of her, in all her love to die,
I can no longer bear ;
’Tis bliss to rend it from its agony
And her brave end to share.’
She holds him : ‘ Stay, beloved wanderer,
Thine eyes shall weep no more :
I feel the holy phrenzy in me stir—
Be mute the torrent’s roar !

xvi.

‘ Look in my face, into my heart descend !
Is boundless love not here
That shall not with this mortal being end,
That after shall appear ?
Have I not died ? Heaven drew me hitherwards
In my fidelity,
And as I leapt the gulf these holy birds
Upbore me towards the sky.’

xvii.

She is a child again ; as ere its flood
She feels first passion rise,
And rush on towards her glorious womanhood
In love that prophesies,

But cannot overtake the full delight '
And while the phrenzy glows
She casts herself with its inspiring might
On him whence it arose.



THE SUN-WORSHIPPER





THE SUN-WORSHIPPER.

I.

As a wild comet through the night she hies,
Her face bent towards the temple of the sun,
With golden hair that on the darkness lies
Like break of dawn when daylight, scarce begun,
Meanders into flame whose flashes run
Along the lower skies.

II.

Soon as the sun lifts up the morning haze
She rushes towards him ; sinks unto the ground
And, clasping the all-shining Presence, prays
In his first beams : again her god is found ;
The startled shadows that her heart surround
Are dizzy in his rays.

III.

‘Thee I adore, O Sun ! this heart is thine !
The youth who blindly claims its ecstasy
Seeks not thy temple, honours not thy shrine ;
He kneels not, utters not his vows to thee
Who all the worlds beyond this world can’t see,
And mak’st all things divine.’

IV.

The sun-flowers turn to heaven as still she kneels,
Shall then her heart its coming vow deplore ?
Not uttered yet, all utterance it reveals,
And she restrains her ecstasy no more :
Her burning lips the hasty vow outpour
Which her heart trouble seals.

V.

‘Never, O Sun ! til sinking in the west
Thou risest where thy wondrous setting spreads,
While all who love thee slumber in thy rest,
Shall he, who proudly in thy presence treads
Enthrall me in the light his beauty sheds,
Or wed me to his breast !’

VI.

Silence has tongues ; she hears a sister say,
‘List to the voice of thy companion-mind !
Thy love is still the same as yesterday ;
It has not passed, it only lags behind,
And thou art lonely as the wistful wind
Thou meet’st upon the way.’

VII.

Yet she repeats her vow, her heart in pain,
To draw some love from heaven, as from the well
Whose radiant springs she once craved not in vain :
But ebbing hope allures her by its spell
To past despair, on other days to dwell,—
And suffer them again.

VIII.

Across the hills of heliotrope she creeps,
Or winds within the many-shadowed wolds,
Till once again the sun her pathway sweeps,
And from her weary feet the way withholds ;
The sacred flowers embrace her in their folds ;
From dawn to dawn she sleeps.

IX.

She sleeps ; so still, not even her shadow veers
Save when from side to side the moonflood roves ;
But in sky-dreams the sun to her appears,
Yet with the visage of the one she loves ;—
All through her sleep in phantom light he moves,
And still that face he bears.

X.

She sleeps, and with the beaming of a bride
Beholds that face ; ah ! never to be wed !
Yet why a tear, no sorrow shall betide :
Though distant borne, his rays on her are shed ;
Her soul, along his way of glory sped,
Shall in his light abide.

XI.

She wakes up with the sun, but in his rise
Sees the rich twilight of her love-dream wane :
Day seems to sink in the deserted skies,
Whose broken, many-coloured beams remain
As of her dream whose night comes back again ;
’Twas dawn had closed her eyes.

XII.

The cloud-slopes blossom still, but cold and lone ;
Down them she floated in those heavenly dreams,
And still the veil that o'er her slumbers shone
Hangs gold-wrought in the fervour of those beams.
She kneels while watching the last fading gleams
O'er the grey twilight thrown.

XIII.

With speechless lips she questions the chill blaze :
Behold the sun returns ; that brighter flush
Were surely day? Yet she mistrusts her gaze
Though the light widens and with lordly rush
The sun bursts forth in morning's youthful blush
And floods the heaven with rays.

XIV.

Trembling she sees the paleness of her face
In those white clouds which now the sun surround,
Who doth in heaven his spectral way retrace.
Behold, the days brought back, the hours unwound,
The angry sun unto the zenith bound
And the pale moon replace !

XV.

Perplexed, all lost, she staggers to the height
Where the twelve pillars in their beauty shine,
The temple circling in the blessed light ;
There prostrate doth she o'er her vow repine ;
But fears to meet the arbiter divine
Who banishes the night.

XVI.

From the lone steps at length she looks above :
Behold the face is there that filled her dreams ;
The youth adored, triumphant o'er her love,
There radiant shines amid descending beams ;
His lustrous hair in the rich sunshine streams,
With golden lights inwove.

XVII.

She lifts her arms, she falls upon the face
She loved in heaven ; her yearning heart, too blest,
Doth in deep sobs its erring way retrace.
All passion weeps, while gathers in her breast
A bliss that bears her spirit to its rest
In that divine embrace.

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